

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
03-04-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Isaiah 43: 16-21	God controls nature – He is doing a New thing
Psalms 126	God does great things He brought the captives back to Zion
Philippians 3: 3-14	Everything of the flesh is rubbish – compared to Knowing Jesus and his death and resurrection
John 12: 1-8	Mary anoints Jesus

Introduction

Today's Gospel reading is not an easy one to listen to, so I'd like to delve into it, in detail this morning.

At the heart of it is that Mary gave extravagantly to God, and the main message for us to consider today is, how extravagantly or generously have we been giving to God this Lent.

Let's now get into the text from our Gospel.

Gospel Setting – Hospitality and Friendship

Let's start with the setting.

The setting for today's text is Jesus sharing a meal with friends. Firstly, we see how the story unfolds in the context of Hospitality. Martha and Mary were providing a meal for Jesus, and we can gather from John's gospel that Jesus had been there before. Given the previous connection, we see how Friendship is also a part of what is going on. Jesus knew Mary, Martha and Lazarus. No doubt, Jesus was a well regarded friend as he had previously raised Lazarus from the dead. Although it is different for us, like Mary, Martha and Lazarus knew Jesus, we too can know God through Jesus.

Mary anoints Jesus

Now, let's look at the central act of the reading today.

Mary puts perfume on Jesus' feet and then wipes them with her hair.

Imagine a bottle of perfume that cost a year of your income. Then imagine using it up, all at once, on the dirty feet of a weary traveller.

Judas pins down Mary's actions as showing extravagant wastefulness and truth to tell if we didn't know who the main characters were, and if we didn't know the end of the story then we too would probably side with Judas.

Who among us could justify wasting a year's wages on perfume? Or half a year's wages, or a quarter of a year? Judas suggests the money should have gone to provide for the poor and how can we possibly argue with such logic?

Even if we're not likely to make the sacrifice ourselves, nevertheless we would recognise it as a generous action and admire and affirm those who could make it.

And how does Jesus reply to Judas' statement about the poor? He says, "*you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.*"

Some of us may wish that Jesus had chosen his words more carefully, because for more than two thousand years many Christians have used this text as justification for doing less than they could to help those who are struggling and in need.

The sad reality is that this passage about extravagant love, can be twisted into a passage about frugality and indifference to the poor!

However, in the text Jesus is speaking about love, about extravagant love, and about faithful intentions.

Jesus knew that Mary's intentions, however extreme they may have been, nevertheless, what she did illustrated the cost of the extravagant love that she was prepared to show to her teacher.

Jesus knew that Judas' intentions, however they appeared to be, were not motivated by love at all.

Mary is the one in this story who puts her whole heart into serving God, even though the way that she demonstrates her faith, and her love is most unconventional.

This passage is about extravagant love: it is not about spending lots of money, or about wasting things needlessly.

It is about love and service for Christ, extreme love, over-the-top love, extravagant love.

When it comes down to the difference between Judas and Mary, then it might appear Judas has the right words. But when we look at it in context, in the end, it is Mary who time and time again shows the behaviour of being faithful to God. It is Mary who demonstrates extravagant love.

So, this story invites us to examine our own lives and it begs the question of us; "What speaks the loudest - your words, or your actions?"
Would you give a year of your income to God out of love?

The season of Lent is a season of self-examination. The Philippians reading today reminds us that compared to knowing Jesus, everything else is rubbish. That is such a big statement to make, but it helps us to realise the significance of what God has done for us in Jesus.

I wonder sometimes, do we realise how much God loves us?

In the light of God's love for us in Jesus, we are called to look carefully at our own lives. What motivates you? What is in your heart? What is behind your words? What do your actions say about who you are?

Conclusion

Before we begin Holy Week next Sunday, before we begin the final approach toward the celebration of Easter Day, let us think about what it might mean for us to engage in some extravagant love.

Let us consider how we, like Mary, might pour out such love toward God, and also on those around us. Amen.